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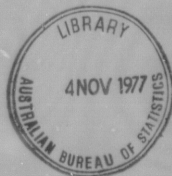
**AUSTRALIAN
STATISTICS
ADVISORY
COUNCIL**

Annual Report

1976~77

AUSTRALIAN STATISTICS ADVISORY COUNCIL

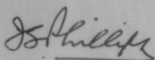
Annual Report 1976-77



The Honourable Phillip Lynch, M.P.
Treasurer of the Commonwealth of Australia

I have pleasure in submitting the Report of the Australian Statistics Advisory Council for the year ended 30 June 1977.

The Report outlines the formation and activities of the Council and is submitted to you, for presentation to Parliament, under section 24 (2) of the *Australian Bureau of Statistics Act 1975*.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'J. G. Phillips', with a horizontal line drawn underneath the name.

J. G. PHILLIPS
Chairman

18 August 1977

Australian Statistics Advisory Council

Membership as at 30 June 1977

Sir John Phillips	(Chairman)
Mr R. J. Cameron	(Australian Statistician)
Dr L. A. Brodribb	Managing Director, M. Brodribb Pty Ltd
Sir Samuel Burston	President, Australian Woolgrowers and Graziers Council
Mr D. J. Delaney	First Assistant Secretary, Premier's Department, Victoria
Prof. R. C. Gates	Professor of Economics, University of Queensland
Prof. J. McB. Grant	Professor of Applied Economics, University of Tasmania
Mr W. J. Henderson	Director-General, Associated Chambers of Manufactures of Australia
Prof. M. S. T. Hobbs	Associate Professor of Social and Preventive Medicine, University of Western Australia
Mr R. A. Jolly	Industrial Advocate, Australian Council of Trade Unions
Mr K. W. Kelly	First Assistant Director-General, Department of Social Security
Mr L. E. McCarrey	Under Treasurer, Western Australian Treasury
Dr W. E. Norton	Chief Manager, Research Department, Reserve Bank of Australia
Mr N. Oakes	Under Secretary and Comptroller of Accounts, New South Wales Treasury
Mr W. J. Orme	Executive Member, New South Wales Privacy Committee
Mr C. R. Rye	First Assistant Secretary, Department of the Treasury
Mr A. M. Smith	Director, Economics Division, Department of Economic Development, South Australia

Introduction

The Australian Statistics Advisory Council was established by the *Australian Bureau of Statistics Act 1975* which was promulgated on 4 February 1976 to take effect on 3 May 1976.

The Chairman of the Council was appointed on 4 August 1976 and other members on 14 January 1977.

This is the first annual report of the Council and is made in accordance with section 24 (2) of the Act which provides that: 'the Council shall, as soon as practicable after 30 June in each year, prepare and submit to the Minister, for presentation to the Parliament, a report relating to matters connected with the operation of this Act'.

Functions

Under section 18 (1) of the Australian Bureau of Statistics Act, the Council is to advise the Minister and the Statistician on:

- (a) the improvement, extension and co-ordination of statistical services provided for public purposes in Australia;
- (b) annual and longer term priorities and programs of work that should be adopted in relation to major aspects of the provision of those statistical services; and
- (c) any other matters relating generally to those statistical services.'

The Act also enables the Minister or the Statistician to seek the advice of the Council on these matters. The Council presumes that it is not debarred from proffering advice on these matters to the Minister or the Statistician on its own initiative if it considers it appropriate to do so.

Membership

The Council consists of the Chairman, the Australian Statistician (*ex officio* member) and between 10 and 22 other members, as determined by the Minister.

At 30 June the other members included 6 members nominated by the State Premiers and a further 9 drawn from business, employer and employee groups, academic institutions, privacy bodies, and senior public servants. The members are widely representative of Government and non Government users of statistics in many fields of economic and social concern.

Tenure of Office

The Chairman is appointed for a period of 5 years, while the other members are appointed for periods up to 3 years, as specified in their instruments of appointment.

The Chairman and the other members are eligible for reappointment.

Summary of the Year's Activities

Council Meetings

During 1976-77 the Council held two meetings, on 22 February and 23 May 1977, in Canberra.

Much of the Council's early endeavours have necessarily been concentrated on how it can best discharge its role and functions, the tasks that lie ahead and the way in which it intends to conduct its business.

Council deliberations included:

- ABS Statistical Programs
- Processing of the 1976 Census of Population and Housing
- Review of Statistics Legislation
- ABS Forward Work Proposals
- Costing of Statistical Output
- Pricing and Distribution of ABS Publications

ABS Statistical Programs

The Council was briefed on the operations and ongoing work programs of the ABS. It discussed possible improvements in the existing range of statistics, as well as curtailments of services made necessary by expenditure and staffing restraints, or because of changing priorities.

Processing of the 1976 Census of Population and Housing

The Council noted that, in view of budgetary pressures, the Government had decided to process detailed information from the 1976 Census of Population and Housing by sampling methods, making possible a saving of \$2 million in 1977-78. The adoption of sampling methods had the advantage that the processing of the schedules could be completed some two to three months earlier than otherwise would have been the case.

The Council encouraged the Statistician to try to ensure that the general public was better informed about the reasons for inclusion of particular questions in, and the use of results from, future censuses.

Review of Statistics Legislation

The Council discussed the problems faced by the ABS in operating under the present statistics legislation and some possible ways of mitigating these problems.

The Council noted that certain provisions in the legislation hindered the ability of the ABS to provide an adequate and efficient statistical service and, at the same time, to avoid unnecessary duplication in departmental statistical activities and an excessive reporting burden on businesses.

ABS Forward Work Proposals

The Council noted that the three year forward estimating process did not ensure funding for the forward plans, particularly in the second and third years. This can create serious difficulties for the ABS, especially in the case of large scale statistical projects.

The Council reviewed important projects which are under consideration within the ABS for implementation in 1977-78 and 1978-79 and expressed interest in certain areas of statistics, including the development of intercensal estimates of population and population projections.

Costing of Statistical Output

At present the ABS does not have a total costing system which allocates all expenditure to individual statistical outputs. Proposals to add to or curtail collections are costed on a marginal cost basis; there is a continuing internal review of resource allocation, in terms of both efficiency and relative priorities; and management controls are exercised through staff ceilings and funds allocations.

Members expressed the view that a relatively simple costing system should be adopted to allocate direct costs to statistical output or projects. Such a system would help in assessing statistical priorities and could serve as an aid to ABS management.

Pricing and Distribution of ABS Publications

The Council noted the current review of the Bureau's publication program and developments in its pricing policy especially in relation to more expensive publications such as State and Commonwealth Year Books.

Future Work

Apart from responding to any specific requests for advice which may be made by the Minister or the Statistician, the Council's intentions include further examination of:

- (a) what amendments are needed in the present legislation covering the Australian Bureau of Statistics to enable the Bureau more effectively to carry out its functions;
- (b) how statistical information available in respect of the States, and particularly the less populous States, can be extended without adding unduly to the burden on respondents and without infringing confidentiality;
- (c) the priorities which might be assigned to various new collections proposed, and which existing collections could reasonably be curtailed or eliminated to free resources for these new or expanded projects; and
- (d) the quality and reliability of existing statistics including any proposals by users of statistics.

Other

The Council expresses its appreciation of the efficient Secretariat services provided by the ABS, and of the information furnished to it which greatly assisted the work of the Council.

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